

This Week in Congress

September 5, 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." If you enjoying receiving this weekly email newsletter, please feel free to forward it on to others who may find it useful.

Celebrating Labor Day

Yesterday, we honored the American working man and woman. Families all across the state gathered together at picnics and barbecues to celebrate the end of summer. I participated in Labor Day parades in Hoisington and Burdick. Hoisington celebrated its 110th annual Labor Day parade and celebration. Burdick's Labor Day celebration featured a two-mile fun run, art and crafts display and homemade ice cream. I appreciated the opportunity to join residents in each community for their annual celebrations.

USDA Drought Assistance Not Enough for Kansas Farmers and Ranchers

I communicated with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns this week regarding the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent announcement of drought assistance. USDA assistance includes \$50 million in Livestock Assistance Grant Program (LAGP) funds, \$19 million in Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) funds, \$11 million in Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) funds, and a one month acceleration of counter-cyclical payments to upland cotton, peanut, and grain sorghum producers.

Kansas is one of the 27 states eligible for LAGP. Producers in counties designated as D4 or D3 level drought areas from March 7, 2006 through August 31, 2006 are eligible to apply for LAGP. Assistance under this program may be provided for such things as the cost of lost forage, supplemental feeding, the cost of relocating livestock to new feed supplies, increased feed transportation costs, and the cost of emergency water supplies. A complete listing of counties deemed eligible for the LAGP can be found at: <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov/fsa.asp> .

I thanked the Secretary for acknowledging the need for disaster assistance and for using all the resources at his disposal. However, I conveyed to the Secretary that the USDA's assistance did not benefit farmers that grow crops like wheat, corn, soybeans, and sorghum. While the assistance provided by USDA will help in a small way, it is not near the amount of help actually needed by Kansas farmers. I asked the Secretary to continue to work with me and other Members of Congress to deliver a meaningful agriculture disaster assistance package.

In late July, I met with a group of concerned Representatives from seven western states to determine a strategy to deliver agriculture disaster assistance. The group was dedicated to obtaining needed relief, but acknowledged that a solution would be difficult to find given the unfavorable views of disaster assistance taken by other Members of Congress.

One possible solution is the 2007 Agriculture Appropriations bill currently awaiting approval by the Senate. The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry added an amendment that would deliver disaster assistance to the nation's farmers and ranchers for the 2005 crop year. The appropriation bill still faces challenges, as it must pass the Senate and survive a conference committee to remedy differences between House and Senate versions. In addition, the Senate amendment does not contain provisions for 2006 losses that were worse than 2005 losses in many parts of Kansas.

Speaking at Salina Education Foundation's First Back to School Breakfast

This week, I spoke at the Salina Education Foundation's first back to school breakfast. The foundation provides grants to teachers and staff in the Salina schools to be used for a variety of things, including equipment and scholarships. During the breakfast, music teacher Linda Rohrer led fifth-graders from Sunset Elementary in performing several songs on drums purchased by a grant from the foundation.

Also at the breakfast was Kaysie Rowson, a 2004 graduate of Salina South and a current junior at Kansas Wesleyan University. Kaysie is the first recipient of the foundation's LIFT program that rewards student teachers with forgivable loans if they return to Saline County and teach.

The most important governmental function at the local and state level is education. It affects the future of our state and our nation. I shared that we have every right to be optimistic when looking at what community support for a school district can accomplish. I applaud the Salina Education Foundation for their efforts to continually improve the learning environment for students, teachers and staff in Salina.

Discussing Farm Issues with Wichita Agriculture Business Council

This week, I spoke to the Wichita Agriculture Business Council about the challenges in developing farm policy. The Agriculture Business Council is a newly formed group of Wichita-area businesses that rely heavily on area agricultural producers as customers for their products and services. A goal of the group is to educate community leaders in Wichita about the importance of the agriculture industry to the regional economy.

I discussed with the group the false perception that we can end the federal deficit just by eliminating payments to farmers. In reality, the entire agriculture budget is less than one percent of total federal spending.

Ribbon Cutting Held for Cedar Creek Bridge at Wilson Lake

This weekend, I attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Cedar Creek Bridge at Wilson Lake in Russell County. The event was hosted by the Wilson Lake Area Association.

I was pleased to announce \$109,337 in funding from the Federal Highway Administration for construction of a new bridge to replace the Cedar Creek Bridge. The bridge has been out of operation since flooding in 1993. The construction of this new bridge will enhance the safety of area residents by improving access for emergency vehicles, such as fire trucks and ambulances. This project will also eliminate an eight mile detour now required to get from one side of Cedar Creek to the other and will improve access to and within the Wilson Lake area.

I commend Russell County Commissioners and the Wilson Lake Area Association members, including President Marcie Moody and Joe Dalton, for their efforts in making the bridge operational again. The Association and Commission each contributed \$15,000 to complete an engineering study needed to move forward on this project.

To my embarrassment, on the way out I got my car stuck. I thank the Russell County Highway Department and Sheriff's office for their help. Despite my predicament, rain is always a good thing.

While I was in Russell County, I also stopped in Lucas for the community's annual Adams Apple Festival. I rode in the parade down Main Street and enjoyed visiting with area residents.

Viewing Production Agriculture in the Mississippi Delta Region

I had the opportunity to address the Delta Council's Mid-year Board of Directors meeting on Thursday. Delta Council is an area economic development organization representing counties in northwest Mississippi. It was organized in 1935 for agricultural, business, and professional leadership of the area to promote the development of the economy.

While there, I was able to get a firsthand look at production agriculture in the Delta region during a field tour. I saw cotton being defoliated, catfish being grown in ponds, and rode along in a combine harvesting rice. Farmers were interested in discussing the upcoming farm bill and the success of rural America in the future. It became clear these farmers want what Kansas farmers

want - the chance to pass down a productive operation to their children and see the values they learned passed on with the farm.

Attending Salina Municipal Airport Briefing about Naval Air Training Command

I stopped at Salina Municipal Airport for a briefing by the Naval Air Training Command. Others attending the briefing were Tim Rogers, Airport Authority Board of Directors, Senator Pete Brungardt, Rep. Charlie Roth, Gerald Cook, Lt. Col. Jeff Jordan, Dr. Dennis Kuhlman and Tom Bell. The briefing included a description of the Naval Air Training exercise currently being conducted at the Salina Municipal Airport and included discussions on how the facilities and Smoky Hill Air National Guard Range are being used to achieve the training wing's mission.

Also discussed was the need for funding to install an aircraft arresting gear system to the runway. I am assisting the Kansas Guard and the Salina Airport Authority in securing funding in this year's military construction bill. This arresting gear equipment provides a safety net for military aircraft on landing and would make the Salina Municipal Airport more usable by military aircraft. This will increase the amount of aircraft able to train at the Smoky Hill Air National Guard Range. With the expansion of aviation operations at Fort Riley, the Range will be a primary spot for joint training operations.

Speaking at the Cloud County Farm Bureau Meeting

On Thursday evening, I spoke to the annual meeting of Cloud County Farm Bureau in Concordia. I always enjoy being in Concordia and appreciated the opportunity to speak about renewable energy and the importance of rural America. As more Americans live in suburban and urban areas, issues unique to rural communities become less understood. Renewable energy offers promising possibilities for maintaining and strengthening our way of life in Kansas. Cloud County Community College (CCCC) is developing a program that will provide students with the skills necessary to work on wind energy projects. Wind and solar energy, ethanol, and biodiesel all offer opportunities for Kansas economic development and will help our nation lower our dependence on foreign oil.

Several awards were presented at the meeting. The "Century Farm" program recognizes family's who have kept their farm a family farm since 1900 or before. The "Century Farm" recognition was given to Colleen Larsen and Jacqueline Ramsey. David and Stacey Forshee were named as the Farm Family of the Year. Families that receive this award have distinguished themselves in the community for their service and are actively apart of production agriculture.

I enjoyed visiting with all who attended, especially Stacey Forshee, President of Cloud County Farm Bureau; and Dr. Richard Underbakke, President of CCCC; and I would like to thank Steve Baccus, President of Kansas Farm Bureau, for introducing me.

Learning about Beloit Juvenile Correctional Facility

On Friday, I was in Mitchell County to visit the Beloit Juvenile Correctional Facility (BJCF). The BJCF is the only state juvenile facility that serves female youth. More than 80 staff members help girls who have committed violent crimes rehabilitate.

While at the center, I toured the administration building, the open dorm, the lock-down dorm and the classrooms. In addition to visiting with staff, I also had the opportunity to speak with some of the girls currently in the facility. It is important that young people who have run into trouble with the law have an opportunity to learn from their mistakes and improve their lives. Thanks to Superintendent Katrina Pollet and her staff's efforts, young Kansans are able to do this.

In addition to touring the correctional facility, I made several other stops in Beloit, including Banner Drive Thru, Noah Law Firm, Frasier & Johnson LLC, City Hall, S and S Drug, Porter House and Mitchell County Hospital. It was good to be in Beloit and visit with residents.

Touring Smith County Memorial Hospital

I traveled to Smith Center this week to meet with the board of directors at Smith County Memorial Hospital (SCMH) and tour the facility. Thanks to the hard work of physicians and staff, the hospital provides excellent medical care and health services to the community and surrounding area.

Recently, SCMH was designated as a critical access hospital. The board of directors and doctors talked to me about the importance of this designation, which will allow the hospital to be reimbursed by Medicare at a more sufficient rate. The hospital also contains a long-term care center, which currently is full and has a waiting list. This is a testament to the quality care the staff provides. Also while I was there, I viewed the new physical therapy center and the community fitness center. These modern facilities help patients recover and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Thanks to Carolyn Hess, Hospital Administrator, for her time in showing me the hospital.

American Legion Breakfast Raises Money for Youth Reading Program

On Sunday morning, I joined members of the American Legion, Sons of the American Legion, and Auxiliary for breakfast. The groups hosted breakfast as a fundraiser for community projects. The funds from Sunday's breakfast will go to Fort Hays State University's Young Readers program. I enjoyed serving coffee to local residents at the breakfast and thank Leon Schumacher and Charlie Staab for their work on this event and support of worthwhile civic projects in Hays.

Kansans Solicited for Funds to Press Social Security "Notch" Issue

This week, it came to my attention that Kansans are receiving fundraising solicitations from interest groups that list my name asking for money to lobby Congress to fix the Social Security "notch" issue. This issue affects many senior citizens in Kansas. While I support fixing the "notch" issue, I am not a part of these organizations' fundraising activities. I appreciate efforts to collectively raise awareness in Congress on specific issues, but I believe the most effective way to communicate with me is by your personal letter, email, or phone call.

The notch issue began in 1972 when Congress passed legislation tying Social Security benefits to the rate of inflation. Although intended to protect current retirees, Congress quickly realized that this legislation could disproportionately increase the benefits for future retirees and bankrupt the system. While efforts were made to protect Social Security, these changes have left recipients with differing benefit levels.

There is legislation pending in the House Ways and Means Committee that addresses the complexity of the issue. H.R. 615, The Notch Fairness Act of 2005 would provide those born between 1917 and 1926 with either a \$5,000 lump-sum settlement paid over a four year period or an improved formula for computing their retirement benefits.

Opening Weekend at 2006 Kansas State Fair

Opening weekend at the Kansas State Fair is always a special time for me. Each year I attend the state fair in order to hear suggestions from Kansans to take back to Washington, D.C.

This weekend I will participate in several events in conjunction with the 2006 Kansas State Fair, including the annual Kansas Farm Bureau Leadership Breakfast on Saturday, September 9.

I will also have an information booth throughout the state fair, September 8 through 17, with members of my staff available to answer questions and provide information to fairgoers. The booth will be located in the Pride of Kansas Building.

Deadline for U.S. Service Academy Nominations Approaching

I want to remind Kansas students the application deadline for U.S. Service Academies is approaching. I am accepting applications for nominations to the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York; the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; the U.S. Air Force Academy

in Colorado Springs, Colorado; and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. Those selected will enter the academies in June 2007.

My application deadline is October 1, 2006. For more information about U.S. Service Academies, visit the "Services" section of my website at <http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov/>. Due to limited placement, I encourage all interested candidates to also apply to the offices of U.S. Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts.

In the Office

Kansans in my office this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol included Theresa Manwaring of Alton and Rose Anne Bura of Wichita with her parents, Aaron and Mildred Bura, of Emporia.

Very truly yours,

Jerry